

An Archipelago of Readers:
The Beginnings of *Archipelago* and
International Publishing on the World Wide Web

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Prekarious

In 1989, did we realize that the twentieth century ended? The world had changed; the change began, I would say, on February 14 that year, when the nation of Iran issued a *fatwa*, a death-sentence, against the novelist Salman Rushdie. He was an Indian citizen with an international reputation living in London, and he was sentenced to death by a foreign government for a work of fiction. That was a terrible shock and sent fear instantly through writers everywhere in the world. I wonder if we recall that fear now. We should recall it. Its memory has affected all of literary life, in that we can no longer believe without question that free speech is indivisible in a civilized, democratic society.

In those years I lived in New York and had a book contract with Viking, Rushdie's American publisher. My editor told me that the chief officers of Viking had for a month eaten and slept in different hotels every night for safety, and that the cost of defending the Viking operations was more than a million dollars. (In July 1991, Rushdie's Japanese

translator would be killed, his Italian translator wounded; in October 1993, his Norwegian publisher would be shot and seriously injured. Rushdie had been put at once into protective custody by the British MI5 and would be guarded for the next ten years, until the *fatwa* was cancelled, if that is the proper verb.)

It was a peculiar moment privately, too, because the book I was writing was about Alaska, and about my work as an itinerant poet among Native people in Alaska. I knew Viking had published a book called CRAZY HORSE, by Peter Matthieson, about (in part) government actions taken against the Sioux, which they had been forced to withdraw from circulation because the governor of South Dakota had brought suit against the writer. In those long-ago days I felt, on the one hand, proud to be part of the link to Rushdie, and, on the other, puzzled because my editor would not discuss the matter of CRAZY HORSE. Perhaps he was legally enjoined from doing so. That long documentary book had come out in 1983, but was not circulated for eight years, until 1991, when Matthieson won the suit. But his victory had not yet happened when, in January 1989, I signed the contract for my own book. From the vantage point of obscurity, I realized that *the writer's* position even in a middle-class world was – precarious.

Knocked About

For several years I had noticed, though obliquely, the disintegration of publishing houses in New York and their transformation into subsidiaries of enormous holding companies, or conglomerates. Suddenly, during one week early in 1994, two good, small literary imprints, Atheneum and Ticknor and Field, were shut down by their conglomerate owners, while at Harcourt Brace, a distinguished old name belonging to another conglomerate, most of the adult trade editors were fired. A shudder of apprehension, or a sort of collective nervous breakdown, went through trade publishing.

The last editor and publisher of Atheneum was Lee Goerner, who was my husband. He was known as a literary editor; before Atheneum, he had been at Knopf for twenty years. When after five years as publisher he was fired, and Atheneum closed, no other company opened its door to him. I watched him try, and fail, to come to terms with a corporate demand for return on investment that was so egregious as to subvert traditional editorial relations. Simultaneously, I endured the "orphanage" of my own manuscript at Viking. What I had thought about books and how they became published was simply, naively wrong.

While I stormed about, Lee suggested reading BEL AMI. He could just as well have recommended Gissing; or I could have read the outcries of many a writer during the last hundred fifty years about the commercialism of publishers. Sooner or later, are not all authors disillusioned by this book business? Yet, I knew – I felt – that something irrevocable had occurred, that the texture of our culture, not just our own lives, had been altered, and that this alteration should be fought; that we stood on the high ground, even as it eroded under us. Lee, on the other hand, possessed of a most un-American sense of irony and with no technical aptitude at all, bought a computer. It was a Mac, and after he died, I began to use it, too.

Thinking about the Web: "Too Democratic"

In 1996, having left New York for the quiet literary-university town of Charlottesville, Virginia, I had the vague notion of starting a new review of literary matters I did not see being attended to, at least in ways that pleased me. In my own work, and through Lee, I was acquainted with writers and editors, and asked several what they thought of the idea. The most interesting suggestion came from Sonja Bolle, then editor of the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, who said I should think about publishing the review on the Internet. Her reasons were these: because the Net was "too democratic." there was no hierarchy, unlike in trade publishing; but there *were* serious readers who didn't care to "surf" the Net: they wanted "authority"; they wanted to know where to go to find good writing. "If you're there, we'll know where to go," she said.

Technology: Baffled

Technically, I knew nothing about the Net. I used an Apple 520 laptop with a black-and-white screen, and though I subscribed, briefly, to America On Line, I detested the witless design of their set-up. I didn't use a browser; the graphical Web didn't exist for me. I needed to learn everything, but not as an amateur. Unfortunately, the word "professional" implied money, and I hadn't any to speak of; that is, I had no investment capital. Nor did I consider trying to raise any until I had something to show for it. An inheritance would cover expenses long enough to see if I could make the journal work as an independent, non-commercial enterprise; this was what Michael Bessie, the publisher, would later refer to as "fuck-you money," the private reserve any small enterpriser needs in a pinch. I asked

technical people how to use the odd forum the Web was for my own purposes; but I hadn't learned the lingo. I didn't even know what questions to ask.

The jargon of the Internet was arbitrary and referential. Yet, in the flood of new terms I heard "pdf," portable document file, meaning (I understood) that a text could be encoded in such a way that it could be read off-line and even printed, but not altered, by the reader. Because copyright was already an issue on the Web – "everyone said" that writers' works were "stolen" and posted without permission, or even rewritten, or even plagiarized – I thought this device ensured security. I didn't know, quite, what "HTML" meant; it means "hyper-text markup language," or the way text and graphics can be reformulated as electrical impulses, transmitted to the ether that is the Internet, and decoded by the receiver's machine. Or, something like that.

Citizens of the World Post-1989

It's generally agreed that the Web was organized in 1989, at CERN, in Switzerland. The man credited with devising it is Tim Berners-Lee, an English physicist who, I'll note, has deliberately taken no commercial benefit from the results of his work, following the old ethic that knowledge is for mutual benefit. On a site maintained by Larry Zeltser (<http://www.zeltser.com>) at the University of Pennsylvania, which offers a history of the Web, I read that "CERN was originally named after its founding body, the 'Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire,' and is now called 'European Laboratory for Particle Physics.'" But I doubt we should suppose the Web was part of a military-industrial complex. It was for the free dissemination of information, but with an important restriction. As Zeltser wrote: "The WWW project is based on the principle of universal readership: 'if information is available, then any (authorized) person should be able to access it from anywhere in the world.'" We've gone beyond that idea of "authorized" readership now, I think.

The "graphical Web" is said to have been launched by the physicist Larry Smarr, director of the National Center for Supercomputing Applications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and director of the National Computational Science Alliance. He devised "Mosaic," the "graphical browser – marketed as the Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer – that opened the Net to the masses."

So, I intended to organize, edit, and publish on this World Wide Web a journal of literature, the arts, and opinion, to be called *Archipelago*. In mid-1996, I had registered a site as www.archipelago.org.

By publishing on the World Wide Web, I expected to make *Archipelago* visible without restrictions of borders or transportation and production costs, to educated readers who were, increasingly, living in and being formed by more than one society. I saw that more of us were becoming citizens of the world post-1989, and that I could, adapting the epigram, publish locally and think globally.

I meant to choose and edit by listening for the writer's voice; to publish literature following its own rules, not those of profit-making or a market; and to offer international writing, by Americans at home and abroad and writers in translation. I would work directly with writers, not through agents. I wanted to give the lie to the received opinion that good publishing and good literature don't necessarily go together (on the Web, at least).

I felt compelled to write an editorial statement of some kind, and came up with the idea "Art and Capitalist Relations and Why Publishing on the Web Might Be Interesting." Reading it now, I find it tells, in miniature, what I expected *Archipelago* to be and do:

I was thinking of where a literary colony might be found, nowadays, and decided that, if one exists at all, geographically and culturally it would be an archipelago. A fine, hard word, *archipelago*, evoking rock-ribbed peaks with green life clinging to their slopes, rising from some vast, erosive ocean. Evoking too, a terrible human history.

Since 1989, the world has changed, politically, historically, culturally. That was a water-shed year, perhaps the real turn of the century: the year of the Velvet Revolution and the opening of the Berlin Wall, that led to the collapse of socialism and the triumph of unregulated capitalism; the year that began with a death-sentence laid against an internationally-known novelist. Our minds have been different since then.

Contemplating that rather large idea I happened upon three articles of recent weeks which seemed to throw a more precise light on the context in which this journal was about to appear....

That context in which *Archipelago* appeared was sharply critical of the ideology of the market and the increasing coarseness of the owners of trade publishing companies. I find my ideas have not changed. Nor has my sense of how the Internet might work as a medium of distribution:

We encourage readers to write us. We encourage them, also, to put this issue on their hard drive, by clicking on the download link and following the instructions thereon. *Archipelago* can then be printed; it will appear on paper as we have designed it, and fill about 50 pages. We urge our readers then to pass the journal on to other readers. We are interested in the notion that the Worldwide Web might also be a publishing medium and a distributor of literature; we think serious readers exist in Buenos Aires, London, Paris, and New York as well as in the Dakotas, Key West, Modesto, Charlottesville. We believe they have more in common than they might have supposed, and will be interested to learn if we are right about this. We also hope that when they disagree with us, and with each other – we suspect that this might often be the case – they will let us know. We are certain that well-formed arguments about literature, the arts, and opinion help keep our minds open.

—*Archipelago*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Endnotes <http://www.archipelago.org/vol1-1/endnotes.htm>

A month later came the first notice, on paper, from London, in the *Times Literary Supplement*:

Archipelago, is launched into cyberspace from Charlottesville, Virginia, joining the relatively small number of serious literary periodicals on the trivia-stuffed World Wide Web.....

Ms. McNamara's first editorial for *Archipelago* adopts a more old-fashioned tone, and ends with the curiously old-media invitation to readers to download the magazine and see how it looks in real, as opposed to cyber, space: 'It will appear on paper as we have designed it, and fill about fifty pages. We urge our readers then to pass the journal on to other readers.' Next they'll be saying, 'I have seen the past, and it works.'

—*Times Literary Supplement*, March 14, 1997

Soon after, *USA Today Online* called us "Cool *Archipelago*: If you're seriously interested in serious literature, read *Archipelago*." Who would have thought it? Our current readership is above 19,000 'unique visitors' a month.

Not a Democracy: A Small Magazine on the Web

If I think *Archipelago* is a print magazine distributed on the Web, if I think it "really" exists in the Download edition, my collaborator Debra Weiss, who became the journal's Web designer, thinks otherwise. It was she who persuaded me to move away from the black-and-white format of the first year (because I had a black-and-white screen). "You're graphics-resistant," she laughed (as she still does), "and you don't believe in color, but people *really do read on-screen*, and you ought to respect that." She showed me that the technology of the Web could be friendly equally to texts and readers' eyes. "We don't have to be 'webby,'" she said, and went on to construct an elegant architecture behind the screen, so that the design of the magazine never falls apart. She made *Archipelago* resemble a printed journal by designing a discreetly-colored logotype and graphical titles, and by linking succeeding pages, so that readers could, in effect, thumb through each issue, while also linking each article to the spine of the Contents page. She refers to my "helpful ignorance" of the Web. I'll ask her to do something (she won't give examples) a technically-adept person would dismiss as too difficult. *Hmmm*, she'll say, then figure out the necessary coding. She reminds me, too, that in this association, we are not a democracy. We are not organized by committee; the integrity of the operation stands or falls on the two of us and our close attention to detail. (Here I must note my own constant failings and her never-ending patience.) She delivers, handsomely, what she likes to call "hand-crafted high tech."

What Is Responsible Publishing?

I thought I had better find out why the book industry, as it was called, worked the way it did. What were "content providers"? It's still impossible to use this phrase without contempt. What did "return on investment" mean? The most important question: Who made the final decision about what books would be published? For it was clear that editors no longer had the decisive say; that is, if they had ever had it. In the large trade companies, Barnes and Noble and the marketing department came to have as much weight as the editor did. What was "responsible publishing?"

It has been remarked that book publishing as a so-called gentleman's occupation began to change about the time the phrase "publishing industry" came into use, around the

mid-1970s. If true, it marks nicely the beginning of the kind of change I was interested in tracing in the business of making and selling books.

Was it true, however: had the gentleman's occupation changed so much, so quickly? Perhaps my assumption was faulty? An editor and publisher of long experience told me that he'd like to take the notion of "gentleman's occupation" and kick it in the head. I liked this and asked him to say more. He did, and a lively conversation ensued.

Not that publishing was ever altruistic. But it was a profession, and it was a way of life: class-bound, often. But books and writers were heavy-weights in our cultural and imaginative life. (We still had private and public lives then. We had, also, the private sector and the public sector, and the walls between them were fairly thick.) Publishing companies were – mostly privately held, even family owned. The big sell-offs began, probably, in the late 1950s, when Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer sold Random House to General Electric. Publishers were, usually, cultivated gents and ladies. Alfred A. and Blanche Knopf, Cass Canfield, Robert Straus, Robert Giroux were notable figures at dinner parties. The publishing houses were "known" as Wasp or Jewish houses. How did this effect who and what they published? An interested person would want to compare their back lists and know who their editors were.

For, In Those Days, In Illo Tempore, editors didn't move around, and they did the hard work necessary for turning manuscripts into good books.

Who gained? Well, books have always had to be sold. But the profit structure was always low. (This remains true, no matter how you work the accounting books.) And then, things began to change. The first million-dollar advance was given to a writer. The IRS reclassified publishers' inventories as commodities rather than potential goods, and books printed but not yet sold became subject to tax.

Substantially, however, what has changed in the business of making and selling books? For I think it can be agreed that enormous change has occurred. What sorts of people went into publishing then? Are they a different sort now? Are there fewer good books, more bad, than ever? Is the art of editing no longer practiced well in the trade? How can we speak of publishing "houses" after conglomeration? Do conglomerate managers know anything about books? I inquired of distinguished representatives of an older generation, and of my own generation of the Sixties, what they thought about these questions.

Generously, these persons told how they entered the book trade; spoke about writers they published and declined to publish; described the (changing) class structure of their

domain; talked straight about money, commerce, and corporate capitalism; described their way of practicing responsible publishing. Without exception, they were serious readers, usually of more than one language. They recognized that times have changed. They spoke with wary-friendly observation of the generations coming up.

Excerpts of these conversations have appeared regularly in *Archipelago* over the last five years (see <http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-1/schocken.htm>). They have served as an opening into an institutional memory contrasting itself with the current corporate structure, reflecting on glories of its own, revealing what remains constant amid the present flux. Despite their surround of gentility, these publishers were – are – strong-minded characters engaged with their historical circumstances. Out of that engagement appeared a number of books that we can say, rightly, belong to literature.

At the same time, Institutional Memory was also my own, very public tutorial. A cliché of the business is that publishing is an accidental profession. You sort of fall into it. You don't, necessarily, set out to be an editor, let alone a publisher. You simply love books, or words, or the smell of glue and binding. Some editors even like writers, although I wonder how often the feeling is reciprocated. Certainly, no sensible writer would ever consider his or her editor an equal, and all publishers should be viewed with suspicion as money-grubbers. That said, let me offer you a few remarks made by some of those book people about their venerable enterprise.

My first conversation was in 1997, with MARION BOYARS, of Marion Boyars Publishers, London. (<http://www.archipelago.org/vol1-3/vol1no3.pdf>)

Marion Boyars began her publishing career in 1960, by buying half-equity in the firm of John Calder, who was known in England for publishing avant-garde writers, among them Samuel Beckett. In 1964, the firm took the name of both owners. For more than 15 years they published the work of novelists considered among the most avant-garde and literary in Britain, among them Beckett, William Burroughs, Henry Miller, Elias Canetti, Peter Weiss, Heinrich Böll, Hubert Selby (whose *LAST EXIT TO BROOKLYN* was prosecuted for obscenity, defended by Calder & Boyars); translations of the *nouveau roman*; the writings of modern composers, and books by social thinkers. In 1975, Boyars and Calder began to dissolve the company; by 1980, the list had been divided. Since 1975, Marion Boyars has published fiction, belles lettres and criticism, poetry, music, theater and cinema, social issues, and biography and memoirs. We became friends. She died three years ago.

I asked her: "What should a writer expect from his publisher?"

She replied: "Loyalty."

Next I spoke to CORNELIA and MICHAEL BESSIE, editor and publisher, respectively. (Part 1, <http://www.archipelago.org/vol1-4/bessie.htm>; Part 2, <http://www.archipelago.org/vol2-1/bessie2.htm>)

Michael Bessie began his career in publishing in 1946, when Cass Canfield, then head of the house, invited him to join Harper and Bros. as an editor. Cornelia Shaeffer, as she was then, joined the firm several years later, as foreign reader; she became an editor, subsequently, for *The Reader's Digest*, Dutton, and, once more, Harper's. In the meantime they had married. In 1960, Michael Bessie left Harper and, with Pat Knopf and Hiram Hayden, founded Atheneum.¹ Cornelia joined the firm a year afterward. They remained with Atheneum until 1976, when they returned to what had become Harper & Row; and where, five years later, they housed their own imprint, Bessie Books. After Harper & Row was sold to Rupert Murdoch and transformed into HarperCollins, Bessie Books migrated, first to Pantheon, then to Counterpoint, of Washington, D.C., which was closed down this spring by its mini-conglomerate owner Perseus Publishing.²

I asked Cornelia Bessie to describe the editor's responsibility. She said firmly: "If you can say to yourself, when that manuscript goes to the printer's, 'This is the best book that this person can write at this time,' then you've done your job."

Michael Bessie, looking to the horizon, said – his words have become my guide – "The important question about the publishing industry is: how well does it serve literature?"

¹ In 1978, Atheneum merged with Scribner's, which was still owned by the Scribner family then. Two years later, Macmillan bought the combined company. The Macmillan company then was bought by the English robber baron Robert Maxwell. In 1992, Maxwell died in mysterious circumstances. His American publishing company, Maxwell-Macmillan, finally was sold to Simon & Schuster, which was owned by Paramount Pictures, which itself had recently been bought by Viacom. Atheneum was closed down not long afterward, in 1994.

² Among the hundreds of authors whom the Bessies, together and separately, have edited and published are (a nearly random selection): Edward Albee, Luigi Barzini, Justice William Brennan, John Cheever, Cyril Connolly, Jan de Hartog, Len Deighton, Janet Flanner, Ruth Gordon, Richard Howard, Guiseppe de Lampedusa, Harper Lee, Nadezda Mandelstam, John McGahern, Nigel Nicholson, André Schwartz-Bart, Jean Renoir, Peter Shaffer, Saul Steinberg, Joanna Trollope, Peter Weiss. Among Nobel laureates, they have published Miguel Angel Asturias, the Dalai Lama, Mikhail Gorbachov, Sir Peter Medawar, Anwar Sadat, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, James Watson, and Elie Wiesel.

WILLIAM STRACHAN (<http://www.archipelago.org/vol2-4/strachan1.htm>) was formerly editor-in-chief at Henry Holt and is now director of Columbia University Press. He took the rare step of crossing over from trade to academic publishing, and he thought in an interesting way about those two not wholly compatible domains: about what they had in common and what they did not. I was interested, too, because Columbia had taken up e-publishing, producing several CD-Roms and sponsoring the first of what it hoped will become a series of scholarly journals published on the internet. Yet, while technology entered the discussion of institutional changes in publishing which has been the theme of the series, it did not dominate; as would be expected, the making of good books — writerly writing, editorial acuity, the publisher's willingness to take a chance, and readers wanting to read — was the real subject.

Strachan said: "I come back to this: the writing. You've got to look at the writing."

SAMUEL S. VAUGHAN (<http://www.archipelago.org/vol3-2/vaughan1.htm>) entered the publishing trade in 1951, as a desk man for King Features Syndicate. The following year he joined the syndication department of Doubleday, where he learned the craft of cutting books into serials, then selling rights to newspapers. He was promoted to advertising manager (1954-56), then to sales manager (1956-58). From sales he moved to editorial, becoming a senior editor in 1958. Ten years later, he was made executive editor of Doubleday. In 1970 he was named publisher and president of the company and remained so for the next twelve years. From 1982 till 1985 he was editor-in-chief of Doubleday. The list of authors he published (it is incomplete) should indicate that he learned the art of publishing books from the ground up.³

³ (Some of the) authors Sam Vaughan edited or published: Diane Ackerman, Shana Alexander, Stephen Ambrose, Patrick Anderson, Bernard Asbell, Isaac Asimov, Laurence Barrett, Dave Barry, Brendan Behan, Ezra Taft Benson, Bill Bradley, Brassai, William F. Buckley, Jr., Herb Caen, Hortense Calisher, Bruce Catton, Charlotte Chandler/Fellini, Joanne Ciulla, George Cuomo, Max Eastman, Dwight D., Milton, and John S.D. Eisenhower, Duke Ellington, Paul Erdman, Fannie Flagg, Sarah Gainham, Ernest K. Gann, Larry Gelbart, Winston Graham, George Garrett, Ruth Gordon, William Goyen, Hannah Green, Josh Greenfield, Leonard Gross, Arthur Hailey, Alex Haley, Marilyn Harris, William Harrison, W.C. Heinz, Mohamed Heikal, Patty Hearst, Thor Heyerdahl, Sir Edmund Hillary, Rolaine Hochstein, Hubert H. Humphrey, J.R. Humphreys, Hammond Innes, Roger Kahn, Garson Kanin, Dr. Fred Kantrowitz, Richard Ketchum, Marvin Kitman, Stephen King, F. Sionil José, Eric Larabee, Gordon Lish, Alistair MacLean, D. Keith Mano, Kai Maristed, John Bartlow Martin, Martin Mayer, Eugene McCarthy, James Michener, James Mills, Gilbert Millstein, Malvin Moscow, Edmund Muskie, Paul Nagel, N. Richard Nash, David

Sam Vaughan told me: "I think the reader has rights."

ODILE HELLIER (<http://www.archipelago.org/vol4-1/odile.htm>) is the proprietor of the Village Voice Bookshop, Paris, where she offers a distinguished list of books published in English, imported from the United States, Britain, the Commonwealth countries. Indeed, for American and British literary life in Paris, including a long list of remarkable authors who have read there over the past twenty years, the Village Voice is the place to go. *The Bookman*, the trade journal of British publishing, named her bookstore "the best literary bookshop in Europe."

She was emphatic about the changes in the life of books and the independent bookstore. "If the bookseller has disappeared, and is only a salesperson, it means that there is no vision. It means that there is no knowledge. It means that, if you sell Gertrude Stein, you put Gertrude Stein at the same level as [John] Grisham: it makes no difference, a book is a product. Thus we have seen the leveling of the meaning of books."

CALVIN REID (<http://www.archipelago.org/vol4-4/reid.htm>) has been a news reporter for *Publisher's Weekly*, the trade paper of the industry, since 1987. He reads omnivorously, is a visual artist, and plays squash. He writes criticism and reviews for *Art in America*, *Artnet.com*, the *International Review of African American Art*, and *Polyester*, a bilingual art magazine in Mexico City, and is a contributing editor of *Bomb*.

Even he, a veteran of the e-boom, said: "The Web is great because you can see things, you can sample things; but, in the end, people want something they can put their hands on. In the end, the book is still the most efficient way to transfer information."

For the final three chapters of *Institutional Memory*, I talked to people involved with the once-great (although small) publishers SCHOCKEN BOOKS. Founded in Berlin in 1933 by

Niven, Louis Nizer, William Abrahams & the O. Henry Prize Stories, Jake Page, William Paley, Joe Paterno, Stanley Pottinger, Jean-Francois Revel, Nelson Rockefeller, William Safire, Pierre Salinger, Harrison Salisbury, Jonathan Schwartz, Winfield Townley Scott, W.B. Seitz, Israel Shenker, Bud Shrake, Nancy Sinatra, David Slavitt, Wilbur Smith, Elizabeth Spencer, Wallace Stegner, Alma Stone, Irving Stone, Lewis L. Strauss, Gay Talese, Alexander Theroux, Tommy Thompson, Ann Thwaite, Henri Troyat, Margaret Truman, Leon Uris, Immanuel Velikovsky, Earl Warren, Peter Watson, Tom Wicker, Paul Wilkes, Lauren Wolk, Yevgeny Yevtushenko.

the merchant Salman Schocken, a cultivated Jew concerned to make the great works of Hebrew literature available to his cultivated German Jewish friends, the Schocken Verlag somehow (though barely) survived the Nazis. By 1939, Schocken had moved to Palestine and founded another Schocken publishing company (and bought the newspaper *Ha'aretz*). From there he went to New York. There, in 1945, Schocken Books came into being, under the co-editorship of Nahum Glatzer and Hannah Arendt. Schocken died in 1959; gradually, his family lost the ability to continue and the firm was sold to Random House, by then owned by the Newhouse family; it is now a tiny imprint in the Knopf Publishing Group, itself a division of Random House. Random House and all its divisions and imprints, along with Doubleday, Bantam, and Crown, is owned by Bertelsmann GmbH., the privately-held German media conglomerate. Bertelsmann owns about a quarter of the publishing companies in New York.

ARTHUR SAMUELSON (<http://www.archipelago.org/vol6-1/schocken.htm>) was the editorial director of Schocken Books in the early 1990s. His insight was that Schocken was a "niche" publisher and could be "positioned" differently than general trade houses. But his optimism was quite definitely qualified.

He told me: "The real weakness in the publishing industry is not from the corporate side. The real weakness comes from the culture. We have less and less of a reading public, less and less of a culture. Period. And I happen to think that actually this is a great time to be a writer. If anybody has something to say, he can get heard. There's more and more product, but less and less that has any value, and anybody, now, who has something to say can easily rise above that noise."

Institutional Memory, charting the whitewater of trade publishing, is, in one sense, a book of used-to-be. Yet, I have used it as a guide to what Michael Bessie (again) calls "responsible publishing," that is, holding your organization to a size you yourself can manage comfortably; keeping your aims in focus; watching your budget. And this, the heart of the enterprise: "*The important question about the publishing industry is: how well does it serve literature?*"

In our very first conversation I asked Marion Boyars, "What is a literary culture? Is there one? Are there many?"

She said, "Undoubtedly, but it's too difficult to define. I mean, the non-literary culture couldn't exist without the literary culture. Everybody knows about Marx and Freud, but you don't have to read them: they're essential, part of the lifeblood; but you don't have to

be part of it. Language develops because of literature. It doesn't develop because of television."

"That might be argued," I said.

She said, "Yes: I know it can be argued; that's why I say it. I don't think television has that much of an effect on 'culture,' though it is informative, while literature has a lot of effect. This is why, when people say obscenity in literature doesn't "do" anything, I think they're wrong. Literature 'does' something. I think obscenity and the forbidden, taboos, as such, are not important in themselves; but they are necessary subjects. It is the *art* that is made of them that refuses to allow us to remain complacent. These things make us reach beyond ourselves, move, grow. They are very important. And through art, we can actually do something positive. We become aware of life through it."

I said: "Certainly, not all books are literature."

"Certainly not," she said.

I said, "And much of what makes a literary culture—"

She finished, "—is language. It is the use of language, the ends to which it's put. It's *how* you put it on the page. People write to me and they say, 'I've written a novel about a such-and-such a subject.' I'm not very interested in that. I'd like to know *how* you've done it, what you've done. Carlo Gébler, an Irish writer, has a new manuscript. Let me read you two lines: 'My name is Douglas Peter; I am a Russian scholar. I am married to a Russian woman, and have been for forty years. I'm extremely miserable.'

"Wonderful. It's got everything there. And that's in the juxtaposition. You could do the same thing in a newspaper report, but it wouldn't be the same. I think this is what writing is."

What is the promise of electronic publishing?

Perhaps I've given a glimpse into the – or, one – promise of electronic publishing. But responsible publishing does not exist when the expectation of (excessive) demand for return on investment becomes the principle reason for a company's existence. Rather, I observe that the arts have long existed because of an active, concerned audience – and because of subsidy by patrons: foundations, philanthropists, *amateurs* in the highest sense. *Archipelago* has no "market"; it produces nothing to "sell." This quarterly of literature, the arts and opinion has readers. It has an editor of strong views, a revolving cast of willing volunteers, and a designer who respects eyes as much as texts. Most of all, its contributors

are writers, artists, and thinkers of high caliber, I would say. Theirs are works of human imagination.

Moreover, there are serious readers in the world. Some of them read *Archipelago*. Our Spring issue – April/May/June 2002 – drew 380,000 'hits' and 17,700 'unique readers'. *Archipelago* seems to have proved itself worthy, in the lively tradition of small magazines.

What are the threats of – and to – electronic publishing?

It is said that donations to the arts are drastically lower, and low, in any case, and that readers are really just consumers. The so-called "global economy" is dangerously confused with reactionary politics. The Web has been invaded by marketers and designers with the taste of television-programmers. In short, bad taste, nasty politics, and the ideology that everything must be for sale may undermine any notion that a literary culture can thrive even in electronic publishing.

An Instrument of Transmission

Art lives in the body and rises from the body. I was typing this insight on an instrument of transmission, my laptop. There came a curious thought. Using a wireless network, I had been paging through *ArtsCanada*, about which I was going to write, and suddenly I wondered whether an American soldier similarly using a laptop and wireless network could see what I saw. If so, what would she do differently?

Have Darkened Our Spacious Skies

If the world does begin in art, then in what does art begin? In a speck in the eye, or sound in the ear . . . a hand or a foot wanting to move . . . the sound of a gun in the background . . .

I live in the home city of Jefferson, who did not free his slaves, except for the children of Sally Hemings, whom he – can I say, loved? Jefferson and his children, both lines, are part of my cultural patrimony, even though my forebears came to this nation some time after Jefferson's death. Up the road, so to speak, lived Washington, who was the only Southern Founder to contemplate freeing his slaves, then do so in his will. As a Northerner, I am always aware of this history of which, by the seeming accident of residence, I am barely part. In this small city the past is in the air and walks the streets in the bodies of residents –

the black men in coveralls plodding along Preston Avenue through the humid summer heat; Rob Coles, fifth-great-grandson of Jefferson and for decades his impersonator, making his way up High Street one wintry evening after a performance, the snow settling on his great-coated shoulders and his reddish, clubbed hair.

May I quote from the Foreword to a recent book – Anthony Dunbar, ed., *HERE WE STAND, VOICES OF SOUTHERN DISSENT*, 2004 – which speaks directly, I think, to the larger issues that have concerned many of us since the 2000 election, that allowed our government to invade Iraq without legal justification; and speaks also of a shadow haunting this community:

Out of the suffering of slavery, civil war, and segregation came redemption through the Southern civil rights movement with its message of resistance to injustice, faith in the rule of law, and belief in human nature as a positive force. This Southern promise of a community of equals built upon individual character has been undermined, however, by an abundant crop of reactionary and harsh public officials, some kept at home and some sent from the South to Washington, who support the economics of militarism, energy exploitation, suburban sprawl, callousness toward the powerless, and piety imposed from the courthouse. These particular Southern contributions have darkened our spacious skies.

We would fool ourselves by supposing that our national policies do not have roots in our various localities; and, equally, that the ethical content of those policies does not then trickle back down into our very streets and houses.

If the arts let us live, nonetheless they do not soothe us. Literature and the ancient art of storytelling are not easily typified, nor will they willingly let their reader off the hook. The arts are neither entertainment nor distraction, nor do they soothe us, nor will they – *nor can we allow them to* – lie to us. Scholars and interpreters must, surely, teach us to keep our eyes and ears open to what is real, our judgment wary of the false narrative and the unearned happy ending. Artists – those who are our best – mirror us as humans back to ourselves, they show us images of how we live on this earth, they portray us as persons to the world.

We are at a crucial point in our existence as a republic. We are obligated to look at ourselves clearly, without illusion, as we are, as we were, and as we might become. Where

else but in the arts will we find what we seek?

.....

One must make

a distinction

however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the

result is not poetry,

nor till the poets among us can be

“literalists of

the imagination”—above

insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, “imaginary gardens with real toads in them,”

shall we have

it. . . .

Marianne Moore, “Poetry”

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